

Message Text

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ACTION ITF-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-06 ISO-00 SR-02 ORM-01 VO-03 SCA-01

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TAGS: SREF, VN HK

SUBJ: VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN HONG KONG

REF: HONG KONG 4951

1. WE HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED A REPLY TO REFTEL WITH TEXT AND GUIDANCE ON ALLEGED DEPARTMENT STATEMENT THAT CLARA MAERSK REFUGEES ARE RESPONSIBILITY OF DANES AND BRITISH. DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT HAS BEEN FRONT-PAGED IN MOST OF HONG KONG PRESS ALONG WITH COMMENTS BY HKG OFFICIALS. WE BELIEVE THAT EXPANSION AND CLARIFICATION OF STATEMENT LOCALLY IS NECESSARY SINCE STATEMENT AS QUOTED IS RAISING TENSION BETWEEN US AND HKG IN WHAT HAS BEEN A CORDIAL AND COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP ON THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEE PROBLEM.

2. IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED THAT THE HONGKONG GOVERNMENT HAS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY RECEIVED A VERY LARGE NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND IS CARING FOR THEM WITHOUT COMPLAINT UNTIL THEIR ULTIMATE DISPOSITION WITHIN THE WORLD COMMUNITY CAN BE DECIDED. THE HONG KONG SITUATION APPEARS TO FIT THE CATEGORY OF THOSE VIETNAMESE WHO FLED TOTHIRD
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COUNTRIES ON THEIR OWN AND WHO ARE REFERRED TO IN AMBASSADOR

BROWN'S MAY 5 STATEMENT. IN THAT STATEMENT, IT IS INDICATED THAT THOSE WHO WERE UNABLE TO SETTLE IN THESE THIRD COUNTRIES, AND DID NOT OBTAIN RESETTLEMENT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, WOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR PAROLE ON A CASE-BY-CASE OR CLASS-BY-CLASS BASIS. CONSEQUENTLY, AND IN LIEU OF GUIDANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT, WE WILL ADOPT THIS BASIC APPROACH TO PRESS AND OFFICIAL INQUIRIES.

3. LOCALPRESS COVERAGE AND COMMENT OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS HAS EXPRESSED INTENSE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CONCERN OVER HONG KONG'S ONCE MORE ASSUMING A ROLE AS REFUGEE CENTER. WHILE INCLUDING WIRE SERVICE REPORTS DESCRIBING REFUGEES ARRIVING IN GUAM AND SUBIC BAY, PRESS HAS FOCUSED ON THE ARRIVAL IN HONG KONG OF THE DANISH FREIGHTER CLARA MAERSK AND ITS 3,743 VIETNAMESE. INITIAL REACTION SUGGESTED AN EXPECTATION THAT ALL OF THESE REFUGEES WOULD BE MOVED ON SHORTLY TO U.S. PROCESSING CENTERS IN GUAM AND WAKE. HOWEVER, COMMENTS BY HKG SPOKESMEN TO THE EFFECT THAT THESE REFUGEES WERE "...THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY" SOMEWHAT MODIFIED THIS INITIAL EXPECTATION. THE CHINESE PRESS IN PARTICULAR BEGAN SPEAKING OF THE DESIRABILITY OF GRANTING ENTRY INTO HONG KONG OF OVERSEAS CHINESE AMONG THOSE REFUGEES WHO MIGHT HAVE FRIENDS OR RELATIVES IN HONG KONG. IN BRIEF, PUBLIC COMMENT AND REPORTAGE UNTIL THE RELEASE OF THE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT OF MAY 6 WAS REASONABLY SYMPATHETIC TO THE EFFORTS OF THE USG TO COPE WITH THE MASSIVE EXODUS OF REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM AND ACKNOWLEDGED THE OBLIGATION OF HONG KONG AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO ASSIST IN THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

4. THE ALLEGED DEPARTMENT STATEMENT HAS CREATED A PERCEPTIBLE SHIFT IN THIS EARLIER SYMPATHETIC ATTITUDE. THE DIRECTOR OF IMMIGRATION'S DESCRIPTION OF THE STATEMENT AS "EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTING" HAS BEEN GIVEN FRONT PAGE PLAY IN VIRTUALLY ALL PAPERS AND IS SETTING THE TONE OF PUBLIC REACTION AND ATTITUDE IN THE COLONY TOWARD THE USG POSITION. "U.S. PASSES THE BUCK TO BRITAIN" IS THE HEADLINE IN ONE PAPER. A SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST EDITORIAL THIS MORNING (WHICH CAN BE REGARDED AS AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF THE HK GOVERNMENT'S VIEW) READS IN PART: QUOTE
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WHAT DO YOU DO WITH NEARLY 4,000 HOMELESS PEOPLE WHO SUDDENLY APPEAR ON YOUR FRONT DOORSTEP WITHOUT WARNING? THIS IS THE MONUMENTAL QUESTION CONFRONTING THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT AT THE MOMENT...THE GOVERNMENT CERTAINLY HAD NO MORE ALTERNATIVE TO ACCEPT THEM THAN DID THE MASTER OF THE DANISH FREIGHTER. HE COULD HARDLY BREAK ALL THE CODES OF THE SEA AND LEAVE NEARLY 4,000 PEOPLE TO DROWN. THAT

HE CHOSE HONG KONG TO UNLOAD HIS TRAGIC CARGO MAY BE UNFORTUNATE, FOR THE COLONY. BUT HE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN WELCOMED ANYWHERE ELSE, EITHER...THE ATTITUDE OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT IS ANYTHING BUT ENCOURAGING. WASHINGTON SAYS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REFUGEES LIES WITH HONG KONG AND DENMARK. CANADA, FORTUNATELY, IS A LITTLE MORE CONSIDERATE AND HAS OFFERED TO AT LEAST TAKE THOSE WHO HAVE RELATIVES IN THE NORTH AMERICAN COUNTRY. AND HOPEFULLY BRITAIN WILL ALSO HEED THE APPEAL. UNQUOTE.

5. WHILE ALL OF THIS MAY SOUND SOMEWHAT PAROCHIAL IN VIEW OF THE ENORMITY OF THE TASK FACING THE U.S. IN HANDLING THE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES GATHERING IN GUAM AND WAKE, IT IS A SITUATION WHICH PRESENTS AN ACUTE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEM IN HONG KONG. WE HAVE BEEN BOMBARDED WITH PRESS QUERIES OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS ALL ASKING ESSENTIALLY THE SAME QUESTION: WHAT IS THE U.S. PREPARED TO DO ABOUT THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN HONG KONG? IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY ADVICE FROM WASHINGTON, OUR PUBLIC LINE HAS HAD TO BE THAT WE ARE CONSULTING CLOSELY WITH THE HK AUTHORITIES, THAT WE ARE TRYING TO BE AS HELPFUL AS POSSIBLE AND THAT A MEASURE OF PATIENCE AND TIME IS REQUIRED IN VIEW OF THE OVERALL COMPLEXITY AND ENORMITY OF THE PROBLEM. HOWEVER, THIS LINE WAS ALREADY BEGINNING TO WEAR A BIT THIN, AND IS VIRTUALLY UNTENABLE IN THE LIGHT OF THE DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT. IF WE CANNOT BE SOMEWHAT MORE FORTHCOMING VERY SOON, WE CAN ANTICIPATE A RISING TIDE OF CRITICAL PUBLIC COMMENT AT USG INDIFFERENCE TO A MAJOR HK PROBLEM.
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